Chronology

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1933

On September 9, Michael Novak (Michael John Novak, Jr.), a grandson of Slovak immigrants, is born to Michael John and Irene Sakmar Novak in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Novak grows up as the oldest of five children in a blue-collar community where the Harvard Classics are the first joint purchase his parents make for their home.

1939

His father moves the family "up on the hill" to the suburb of Southmont.

1943-1947

Through promotions, his father moves the family to Indiana, Pennsylvania, then McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

1946

A true western Pennsylvanian, Novak organizes eighth-grade football team (six-man, tackle) to play all comers. The team finishes the season at 16-3.

1947

Founder and editor of eighth grade yearbook, The Crusader, at Pius V grammar school, McKeesport. Enters Holy Cross Seminary of the Congregation of Holy Cross at the University of Notre Dame at age 14.

1951

Graduates from Holy Cross Seminary, chooses the newly formed Eastern Province of the Congregation of Holy Cross, and enters the novitiate at North Dartmouth, Massachusetts.

1952

Enters Stonehill College in North Easton, Massachusetts.

1953

A younger brother, Richard, follows Novak to Notre Dame and then into the Congregation of Holy Cross, Eastern Province.

1955

Captains the Seminary's intramural championship touch football team, which loses only two games in four years. In 1955, Novak is league's highest scorer.

1956

Graduated Summa Cum Laude, with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and English from Stonehill College. Chosen by his superiors for higher theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome. Publishes first national article in Commonweal, the liberal lay Catholic journal.

1957

Organizes international quarterly, Colloquium, for Holy Cross Congregation. Also leads first international convention of all seminarians in Rome for "coming Catholic renaissance."

1958

Graduated Cum Laude, with a Bachelor of Arts in Theology degree from Gregorian University. Beginning to doubt his vocation, transfers to Catholic University in Washington, D.C., that autumn.

1960

Leaves the Congregation of Holy Cross after twelve years in seminary and within months of ordination as a priest. Given $100 by his father, moves to New York City to finish a novel. Works on an unsuccessful political campaign for a New Jersey congressional candidate, where he coins the phrase "New Frontier." (Using different sources, John Kennedy later appropriates the term for his presidency.) Naively applying only to Harvard and Yale, he is accepted at both. Enters Harvard in September on a graduate fellowship.

1961

Receives prestigious Kent Fellowship as well as a teaching fellowship at Harvard. His first novel, The Tiber Was Silver, is published. Publishes "God and the Colleges" in Harper's. Brother Dick is ordained a priest in LeMans, France, June 29, and chooses to become a missionary. He is later sent to Dacca, East Pakistan, to study Arabic.

1962

Novak raises questions about Catholic teachings on birth control privately with John T. Noonan, Jr., and others at Harvard. In May, meets Karen Ruth Laub, young assistant professor of art at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, a painter and former student of Oskar Kokoschka and Maurizio Lazansky. That summer, returns to Europe to work on a novel, and visits editors of Catholic journals in England and France to raise questions about birth control.

1963

On June 29, marries Karen Laub, now a professional artist and illustrator. Between 1965 to 1972, they have three children, Richard, Tanya, and Jana. Using their savings, they take a six-month honeymoon in Rome. As a freelancer, Novak covers the second session of the Second Vatican Council for various publications and inherits a friend's contract for a book on the Council (manuscript due January 16, 1964). Karen does a set of seventeen lithographs on "The Apocalypse."

1964

On January 16, younger brother Richard, C.S.C., is murdered in Dacca during the Hindu-Muslim riots, his body never recovered. After delivering the manuscript for The Open Church, and after his brother's memorial mass, Michael returns to Harvard for spring semester. Three books, The Experience of Marriage, A New Generation: American and Catholic, a collection of his essays, and The Open Church, are published, launching Novak's career as one of his generation's most insightful philosophers and theologians. The Experience of Marriage, which Novak edits, features thirteen Catholic couples candidly discussing the moral dilemmas of birth control in marriage. *The Open Church*, in which Novak stakes out a position as a liberal Catholic intellectual (modeling his report on Lord Acton's coverage of Vatican I), is regarded as the landmark publication covering the second (and most decisive) session of the Second Vatica Council. Returning to Rome in the fall on a six-month assignment for Time magazine, Novak finds wide access to the halls of the Vatican for the Council's third session. Karen finishes six etchings on T. S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday."

1965

Accepts a three-year assistant professorship in religious studies at Stanford University, the first Catholic to hold such a position in the program's history. For two of the three years, the senior class elects him as one of the university's two most influential professors. Novak's *Belief and Unbelief* engaged with leading unbelievers, argues the case for belief in God through self-knowledge, and is

hailed as a classic. It remains Novak's best-selling book, with about 200,000 copies sold.

1966

Receives a Master of Arts in History and Philosophy of Religion from Harvard University. Becomes associate editor at Commonweal. As American involvement in Vietnam grows, Novak at first supports intervention.

1967

Travels to Vietnam (visiting three of his students there) to monitor national elections. Serves as the first Catholic contributing editor at Christian Century magazine, a position he holds until 1980, and becomes contributing editor to the Journal of Ecumenical Studies. A Time to Build, a collection of his essays on a broad range of philosophical and political subjects, which includes an account of his growing resistance to the war in Vietnam, is published. With Robert McAfee Brown and Abraham Heschel, he also writes Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience, a major text of the anti-war movement. Joins the board of CALCAV, Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam.

1968

Becomes the first Catholic contributing editor for Christianity and Crisis, a position he holds until 1976. Edits American Philosophy and the Future, published in English and French. Works on the campaigns of presidential candidates Eugene McCarthy and Robert

F. Kennedy. Accepts associate professorship of philosophy and religious studies at the State University of New York (SUNY) in Old Westbury, the state's experimental campus, under Harris Wofford.

1969

Chosen to serve as provost of Disciplines College at SUNY Old Westbury. A Theology for Radical Politics, a collection of essays siding with, but also questioning, the New Left, published.

1970

Helps launch the Hastings Institute, a study center for bioethics. Novak's Naked I Leave, his second novel, and *The Experience of Nothingness*, an American response to the European analysis of nihilism, is published to considerable critical acclaim. (It remains in print.) His brief monograph, "Story" in Politics, also appears. Awarded an LL.D. from Keuka College in Keuka, New York. Spends summer and fall campaigning for democratic congressional candidates in 39 states with R. Sargent Shriver. Begins to worry about the split in the Democratic party between the universities and the people.

1971

Named as a judge for the National Book Awards, and the DuPont Broadcast Journalism awards, the latter until 1980. Receives an L.H.D. from Davis and Elkins College in West Virginia. Two collections of essays, Politics: Realism and Imagination and All the Catholic People, and Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove, an

introductory textbook to religious studies, appear. Takes a leave of absence from SUNY Old Westbury in autumn to work on the presidential campaign of Senator Ed Muskie. Karen wins commission for 12-foot bronze statue of Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug, for a park in Cresco, Iowa.

1972

Returns to SUNY Old Westbury in January and covers successive primaries in weekly essays for Newsday. His The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics appears early in the spring, predicting a "new politics of neighborhood and family" and the growth of interest in roots, "the new ethnicity," and cultural pluralism. Asked to join the presidential campaign of Senator George McGovern after the Democratic convention, he spends August through November with Sargent Shriver's vice-presidential campaign as chief speechwriter. Drawings by his wife, with accompanying texts (written during earlier years) finally appears as A Book of Elements.

1973

Invited to design a new humanities program for the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, serving as associate director. Drawing on lessons learned about the "symbolic geography" of America in the national election campaigns of 1970 and 1972 and reflecting on the current and perennial crisis in the Presidency, Novak begins writing Choosing Our King.

1974

After accomplishing his task at the Rockefeller Foundation, Novak fulfills a lifetime ambition to write and lecture full time on his own. Novak establishes EMPAC, the Ethnic Millions Political Action Committee and successfully campaigns for the creation of a White House Office of Ethnic Affairs. Serves as an advisor to the office during the Ford and Carter administrations. Choosing Our King published.

1976

Accepts a University Chair at Syracuse University as the Ledden-Watson Distinguished Professor of Religion. Chosen as writer in residence at the Washington Star. That same year, his "Illusions and Realities" becomes a syndicated column. Receives an L.H.D. from LeMoyne College in Syracuse, New York. The Joy of Sports, part of Novak's cycle of sustained theological reflection on all aspects of culture, is published and praised by, among others, Norman Mailer and George Plimpton. Its aim is to answer the question: What explains the fact that a grown man is depressed when his favorite team loses? It explores the mythic dimensions of baseball, basketball, and football, the three sports invented by Americans for Americans. Novak's favorites: in football, Notre Dame; in baseball, the Dodgers (Brooklyn once, now Los Angeles); in basketball, Duke.

1977

Awarded his second LL.D., this time from Stonehill College. Also receives an L.H.D. from Sacred Heart University.

1978

Washington-based American Enterprise Institute chooses Novak to become its resident scholar in religion and public policy, a position he continues to hold. Johnstown, Pennsylvania names him Man of the Year. The Guns of Lattimer, a history of an 1897 coal strike in Pennsylvania in which 19 Slavic immigrant miners were killed and another 31 seriously wounded by a sheriff's posse which was later cleared of all charges, is published, as well as The American Vision, Novak's first effort to distinguish the three great social systems of the free society: polity, economy, and culture.

1979

His syndicated column, "Illusions and Realities," becomes a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Named religion editor at the National Review, a position he holds until 1986, and begins an regular column, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow," that appears monthly. Receives an L.H.D. from Muhlenberg College. Novak launches a series of five summer institutes jointly sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute and Syracuse University (later Notre Dame) to explore new questions about religion and economics.

1980

Chiefly on foreign policy and economic grounds, Novak supports Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter in the presidential campaign, as a "Reagan Democrat." By now, Novak is broadly identified with the "neoconservative" camp, former leftists now critical of the left.

1981

In January, named as U.S. Ambassador to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations. His collected speeches, Rethinking Human Rights I, from the 37th Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, is published. Receives L.H.D.s from Boston University and D'Youville College. He is presented with the Friend of Freedom award by the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. U.S. Catholic bishops begin drafting a controversial letter questioning the validity of American nuclear policy, a letter to which Novak's opposition later plays a significant role.

1982

The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism is hailed by reviewers as "the best treatment of the moral and religious basis of capitalism since Adam Smith." The book asserts that capitalism is "a necessary but not sufficient" condition for democracy. Founds a new quarterly, This World and a new monthly, Catholicism in Crisis (later shortened to Crisis). Rethinking Human Rights II, from the 38th Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, is published.

1983

National Review devotes entire issue to "Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age," a lay letter drafted by Novak and signed by a committee of one hundred, challenging the first draft of the American Catholic bishops' letter on nuclear policy. The bishops emphasized the morality of certain weapons, while the lay letter

emphasized the crucial role of politics: Change the politics of the U.S.S.R. and the whole problem changes. Confession of a Catholic, a book of reflections on each item of the Nicene Creed, criticizes trendiness and accommodationist tendencies, especially with respect to radical feminism, presenting arguments, for example, why the Nicene Creed speaks of "God the Father" and why, at the incarnation, the Messiah came as a male, not a female. Critics say Novak is becoming a neoconservative in theology as well as in politics. Named to the George Frederick Jewett Chair of Public Policy Research at the American Enterprise Institute. Receives an L.H.D. from New England College.

1984

Although he had already served for two years, confirmed by the U.S. Senate to join the Board of International Broadcasting, the governing body of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Named as a member of the State Department monitoring panel for UNESCO. Becomes a vice chairperson for the Lay Commission of Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy. Together with the commission, Novak drafts Toward the Future, a powerful endorsement of the interplay between Catholicism, capitalism, and economy. The report stands in stark contrast to a soon-to-be-released American bishops' first draft (of three) criticizing the American economic system. Awarded the George Washington Honor Medal from the Freedom Foundation. Receives an L.H.D. from Rivier College. Freedom With Justice published.

1985

Selected by President Ronald Reagan as a member of the Presidential Task Force of the Project for Economic Justice. Presented the Award of Excellence, Religion in Media, at the 8th Annual Angel Awards. Named as the first U.S. member to the Argentine National Academy of Sciences, Morals and Politics. The struggling Polish liberation movement, Solidarnosc, publishes an underground edition of Novak's The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism. It is followed by other editions in Latin America, Czechoslovakia, Italy, France, Germany, South Korea, and China.

1986

For Marquette University and AEI, Novak establishes the Working Seminar on Family and American Welfare Policy. He is named as a Council Scholar for the Library of Congress, a position he continues to hold, and is also appointed as U.S. Ambassador to the Experts Meeting on Human Contacts of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe—an extension of the Helsinki Accord negotiations. Chosen by Slovak immigrants to receive the Ellis Island Medal of Honor at ceremonies for the hundredth anniversary of the Statue of Liberty. Publishes two long monographs, *Human Rights and the New Realism*, delivered at Harvard, and *Character and Crime*, delivered at Catholic University. *Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology* questions the folly of recommending socialism for societies in Latin America, and offers an alternative more likely to help the poor.

1987

Becomes a visiting W. Harold and Martha Welch Professor of American Studies at Notre Dame (as a commuter) for the autumn semesters of 1987 and 1988. Presents public lectures at Notre Dame for the 200th Anniversary of the U.S. Constitution, "How to Make a Republic Work." Meanwhile, named director of social and political studies at AEI. Receives an L.H.D. from Marquette University. The report on the Working Seminar on Family and American Welfare Policy, *New Consensus on Family and Welfare*, drafted by Novak, is highly praised by left and right and widely credited with influencing the Welfare Reform Act of 1988. Installation as Knight of Malta, K.M.G.

1988

During fall semester at Notre Dame, presents monthly public lectures on the ongoing presidential campaign. To Novak's delight, Notre Dame wins national football championship. Taking Glasnost Seriously, his memoir from the Helsinki negotiations in 1986, published. Delivers centennial lectures at Pontifical Catholic University of Santiago, Chile.

1989

Forbes magazine begins running Novak's column, "The Larger Context." Free Persons and the Common Good published.

1990

Becomes a contributing editor of First Things magazine. Honorary degree as Maestro Visitante from La Universidad Popular Autonoma

del Estado de Puebla, Mexico.

1991

Pope John Paul II issues Centesimus Annus, his call for "a business economy, a market economy, or simply free economy," and many observers note echoes of Novak's writings. This *Hemisphere of Liberty*, a collection of Novak's lectures in Latin America, rethinks arguments for capitalism and democracy in classic Catholic terms, calling Thomas Aquinas "the first Whig." Accredited as Honorary Professor of Universidad de Guyo in Mendoza, Argentina.

1992

Margaret Thatcher presents Novak with the annual Anthony Fisher Prize for his The *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. Leads first in series of summer institutes on The Free Society for Eastern European students, Liechtenstein.

1993

In February, becomes editor-in-chief of the monthly journal Crisis. Delivers the Hayek lecture in London, sponsored by the Institute for Economic Affairs. The *Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, exploring the moral underpinnings supporting a free market system, published. The book challenges the long-held notion that the Protestant work ethic is at the heart of capitalism and, instead, offers a "catholic ethic" (small "c")—stressing creativity and community—as a better guide to understanding business, as well as solving problems of poverty, race, and ethnicity. In addition, the

book opens up the question of "cultural ecology," that is, the sort of culture necessary to make a free society work. Honorary doctorate from Universidad Francisco Marroquin, Guatemala.

1994

Awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, presented at Buckingham Palace by Prince Phillip; delivered the Templeton address in Westminster Abbey. Received the Institution for World Capitalism International Prize with Milton Freidman and Vaclav Klaus. Received Weber Award for contributions to Catholic and Social Thought in Essen, Germany.

1996

Edited *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society* ↗. Published the book, *Business as a Calling*. Received the highest civilian award from the Slovak Republic: "Double White Cross Order II".

1997

The Fire of Invention, published

1998

Receive the Bratislava Medal. Received Cézanne Medal form the City of Provence, also in 2001. *Tell Me Why: A Father Answers His Daughter's Questions About God*, written with his daughter Jana Novak, was published.

1999

On Cultivating Liberty, published. Received the Boyer Award. Received Catholic Culture Medal of Bassano del Grappa in Italy. Received Ludwig von Misses Award in Mexico City.

2000

Received the Economics Medal from the Institute of Italian Managers and Entrepreneurs (IDI) Received the Masaryk Medal, presented by Vaclav Havel by the Czech Republic Edited A Free Society Reader.

2001

Received the 2001 Award of the Liberal Institute in Prague. Received Cézanne Medal from City of Provence, also in 1998. Wrote *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*. Gold Medalist, The Pennsylvania Society.

2002

Became a Member of the National Endowment for Democracy Board, a position held through 2004

2003

Trip to Rome to give defense of US position on war in Iraq (see account in Writing from Left to Right); received the Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom, Washington D.C., in November.

2004

The Universal Hunger for Liberty: Why the Clash of Civilizations Is Not Inevitable, published. Received Medal of the Italian Senate, Awarded by the International Scientific Committee of the Pio Manzù Centre, (Mikhail Gorbachev, President), October.

2005

Traveled on Air Force One with President George W. Bush to attend the funeral of John Paul II.

2006

Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of Our Country published (with Jana Novak).

2008

No One Sees God: The Dark Night of Atheists and Believers, published.

2009

After 46 years of marriage Karen Laub-Novak passed away in August.

2010

Moved temporarily to Florida to teach at Ave Maria University. Made that a permanent move in 2011, and continued to teach

courses at AMU until 2016.

2011

Living the Call: An Invitation to the Lay Vocation (with William E. Simon, Jr.), published.

2012

Received Commodore's Cross with a Star of the Order of Merit, Republic of Poland in December.

2013

The Myth of Romantic Love, and Other Essays (edited by Elizabeth Shaw) and *Writing from Left to Right: My Journey from Liberal to Conservative*, published.

2014

Traveled to Rome in April to attend the canonization of St. John Paul II. in the fall, lectured in Prague and Krakow (October) and Vilnius, Lithuania (November).

2015

Received honorary degree from The Catholic University of America in May. in residence to lecture at CUA in the fall semester. Published *Social Justice Isn't What You Think It Is*, authored by Michael and Paul Adams, with Elizabeth Shaw.

2016

Appointed to teach courses on “The Meaning of Human Ecology” and “Business as a Calling” at The Catholic University of America. Moved to DC in August. Received Lincoln Literary Award from the NYC Union League Club in September. Diagnosed with cancer later in fall.

2017

Passed away February 17. Funeral in the Crypt Church of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on February 25. Burial at Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, DC, on February 27.

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